

Texas Veterans Voice

A PUBLICATION OF THE TEXAS VETERANS LAND BOARD ☆ JERRY PATTERSON, CHAIRMAN

SUMMER 2012
texasveterans.com



SERVING TEXAS VETERANS

GENERAL INFORMATION

800.252.VETS (8387)
512.463.5060

VETERANS HOMES

Ussery-Roan

Amarillo, Texas
806.322.VETS (8387)

Lamun-Lusk-Sanchez
Big Spring, Texas
432.268.VETS (8387)

Clyde W. Cosper
Bonham, Texas
903.640.VETS (8387)

Ambrosio Guillen
El Paso, Texas
915.751.0967

Frank M. Tejeda
Floresville, Texas
830.216.9456

Alfredo Gonzalez
McAllen, Texas
956.682.4224

William R. Courtney
Temple, Texas
254.791.8280

Watkins-Logan-Garrison
Tyler, Texas
903.617.6150

VETERANS CEMETERIES

Central Texas

State Veterans Cemetery
Killeen, Texas
254.616.1770

Rio Grande Valley

State Veterans Cemetery
Mission, Texas
956.583.7227

Texas State Veterans Cemetery

at Abilene
Abilene, Texas
325.673.4446

Coastal Bend

State Veterans Cemetery
Corpus Christi, Texas
361.248.4830

VLB Increases Home, Land Loan Limits

Texas veterans and active duty service members can afford a wider range of homes and tracts of land now that the VLB has increased its home and land loan limits.

At its April meeting, the three members of the Texas Veterans Land Board raised the agency's home loan limit from \$325,000 to \$417,000 and its land loan limit from \$80,000 to \$100,000.

"This makes it a lot easier for Texas veterans to take advantage of today's market and buy the home of their dreams," said Texas Land Commissioner and VLB Chairman Jerry Patterson. "We're glad to make this change because if anyone has earned that right, it's Texas veterans."

Increasing the VLB's home loan limit makes it

possible for veterans to buy a home priced up to the federal Veterans Administration's maximum loan guarantee entitlement of \$417,000 without having to take out two loans. Under the VLB's previous loan limit of \$325,000, a veteran financing a home purchase between \$325,000 and \$417,000 would have to apply for a separate loan to cover costs above \$325,000. Eliminating the second loan will save veteran borrowers closing costs and reduce paperwork.

By raising its land loan limit the VLB makes it easier for veterans to buy larger tracts and to finance smaller, more expensive parcels in urban areas.

For more information on VLB loans, visit texasveterans.com. ☆

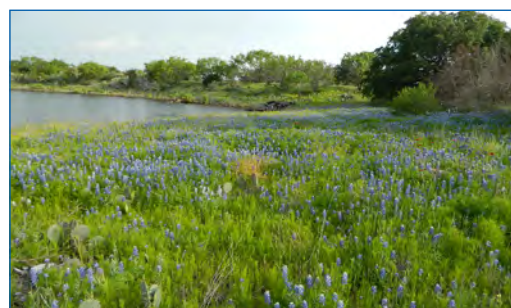
VLB Markets Forfeited Land

In an effort to spur the sale of forfeited land, the VLB is stepping up its marketing of tracts returned by veterans who defaulted on their VLB land loans.

VLB staff members began visiting parcels to place new "Land For Sale by VLB" signs and take photographs of the tracts, which will augment existing property descriptions on the agency's website. To see a searchable list of forfeited properties, visit <http://www.glo.texas.gov/vlb/veterans-benefits/forfeited-land-sales/index.html>.

The VLB marketing staff has listed some of the tracts on Facebook and Twitter. The agency also placed a print ad in Texas Monthly magazine, whose readership includes a large segment that own second homes or land. Plans are also in the works to put classified ads on www.Craigslist.org.

Forfeited tracts that don't sell at the VLB's veteran-only auctions in April and October are



made available to veterans and the general public. Veterans whose bids are accepted may apply for VLB financing, while members of the general public must find their own source of financing. VLB land loans are available to qualifying veterans for up to \$100,000 at 7.25 percent interest over 30 years with 5 percent down. Since the VLB continually evaluates its land inventory and sometimes discounts tract prices, it's a good idea to check the site often to see if the time is right to buy your own piece of Texas. ☆

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A Message from the Chairman

BY VETERANS LAND BOARD CHAIRMAN JERRY PATTERSON



Fellow Veterans:

The innovative Watkins-Logan-Garrison Texas State Veterans Home in Tyler recently welcomed its first residents, who will no doubt be spoiled by the eager staff. Our Tyler home is not your traditional nursing home; it has 10 cottages, each containing 10 private rooms. This new design has more of a home-like feel to it, with each cottage boasting an open kitchen, a dining room and large table.

Residents will eat family-style meals together at the table and enjoy each other's company in the cottage's large living room, with its fireplace.

The state-of-the-art Tyler veterans home joins seven others

across the state in Amarillo, Big Spring, Bonham, El Paso, Floresville, McAllen and Temple. But unlike previous Texas State Veterans Homes, this one focuses on drawing residents into social connection by mixing the best communal aspects of a home while still maintaining privacy and independence for residents.

In other important VLB news, I'm pleased to announce new, higher loan limits for veterans seeking to buy a house and/or land. Now an eligible Texas veteran can get a VLB home loan of up to \$417,000 and a \$100,000 VLB land loan for tracts of 1 acre or more. This combination allows veterans to buy tracts near cities and build their dream homes on them.

For additional information on homes and cemeteries, as well as low-cost home, land and home improvement loans, please call 800.252.VETS (8387) or visit the VLB website at texasveterans.com. Or, find us on Facebook at facebook.com/TXVLB.



SERVING TEXAS VETERANS
for life

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Alan K. Sandersen, Member

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Smithville Veterans Memorial Park

Smithville Mayor Mark Bunte said he always wanted to find a way to honor veterans, and now has found a way to do it.

The Smithville Veterans Memorial Park project is currently under way, thanks to generous donations and input from veterans and their families in the community, he said.

"In the last 21 months, our small community has raised \$550,000 toward the needed \$729,000 to build this park," Bunte said. "I think we will raise the remainder in about three months."

The park was originally envisioned to commemorate five area soldiers who died while fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, a high number for a small rural area with a population of 3,908. The memorial has now expanded and will serve as a tribute to all veterans, living or deceased, who served from Bastrop County, Bunte said.

The memorial features a large sculpture of an angel by artist Bill McGlaun. The angel

holds the dog tags of Smithville area soldiers Sgt. Mario Rodriguez, Jr. (June 11, 2010, Afghanistan); Lance Cpl. Cody R. Stanley, (Oct. 28, 2009, Afghanistan); Spc. Joshua Ray Farris (July 9, 2009, Afghanistan); Captain Joshua Meadows (Sept. 5, 2009, Afghanistan); and Pfc. Tina Marie Priest (March 1, 2006, Taji, Iraq).

Bunte said the memorial will also include a splash park activity area for children, which was specifically requested by the families of the fallen soldiers.

For more information or to donate to the Veterans Memorial Park, visit texasmemorialpark.org. ☆



McGlaun working on the sculpture.

Veterans Voice Newsletter

The *Veterans Voice* is a free, electronic quarterly publication of the Texas Veterans Land Board.

Anyone can sign up to receive *Veterans Voice* by going to <http://www.glo.texas.gov/cf/newsletter-signup/index.cfm?auto=33>

Additionally, veterans can register with the VLB to receive other program information and updates at

<https://s3.glo.texas.gov/veteran-registration/index.cfm>.

Introducing the New and Improved VLB

Since 1946, the Veterans Land Board (VLB) has been helping veterans finance their piece of Texas. In the past, this arm of the Texas General Land Office hasn't always been known as an innovator, and often left the impression that the services weren't as efficient as they could have been.

Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson, who also serves as Chairman of the VLB, said major improvements have been afoot at the VLB, starting with the name it uses to identify itself. While providing land loans was the VLB's only service to veterans for many years, Patterson said, the re-branding of the agency highlights the fact that land is no longer the only club in the VLB's bag.

"The VLB offers Texas veterans more than just a land loan," Patterson said. "From low-cost land, home and home improvement loans to long-term, high-quality nursing care and free burial in any of four Texas State Veterans Cemeteries, the VLB has grown and we want to get the word out."

In addition to offering more and better benefits, the VLB has streamlined its loan processing, making every transaction faster. The days of a VLB loan taking months to complete is a faint memory.

"It's paying off," Patterson said. "We're now closing our land loans in less than 30 days on average—in line with or faster than the rest of the industry."

Providing online applications and requiring fewer forms and affidavits from applicants was the first step, he said. An imminent move to a paperless environment, including electronic signatures on documents, will further streamline the processes.

Other changes, like upgrading the agency's customer service database and integrating it with the telephone system, are geared toward improving the experience of veterans who call the VLB.

"A veteran's first contact with the VLB is usually through our toll-free help line, so we want to make sure those specialists are well trained in customer service techniques, and have as much information

at their fingertips as possible to make that phone call a good experience for the veteran," Patterson said.

The VLB also recently increased its loan limits to \$417,000 for homes, and \$100,000 for land loans, which means more opportunities for veterans to purchase their personal piece of Texas. Home loans must be used to purchase a veteran's primary residence.

And finally, in addition to publicizing the "new" VLB in traditional media with both paid ads and free PSAs, the social media sites Facebook and Twitter have been embraced, and a blog will soon be launched to provide the latest updates to the public—not just veterans.

"Let's face it, with 1.7 million veterans in Texas, everyone either works with a veteran, knows a veteran, or has a veteran in their family," Patterson said. "The VLB is trying to reach all Texans with the message about the positive changes, improvements and upgrades we've made to the program so we can continue our mission of serving Texas Veterans—for life." ☆

Serving Veterans, One Benefits Fair at a Time

Hosting benefits fairs is one of many ways the VLB reaches thousands of veterans each year. On March 24, we hosted our first fair of 2012 at the Tarrant County Community College Southeast Campus.

VLB staff members were on hand to assist with home, land and home improvement loans, Texas State Veterans Homes and Texas State Veterans Cemeteries.

A cross section of vendors at the event included claims and benefits groups, service organizations, colleges and universities, veteran support groups, money matters organizations, and senior

services.

"Our goal is always to ensure we have a wide variety of vendors to meet as many needs of our veterans as possible," said Paul Moore, VLB Executive Secretary.

More than 650 veterans and their families from all over the Dallas-Ft. Worth area visited the three-hour benefits fair.

A benefits fair and housing information summit, presented in conjunction with the Association of the United States Army (AUSA) and the city of Houston, was held on May 19 at the Reliant Center. ☆

Upcoming Benefits Fairs

Free "come and go" benefits fairs to showcase resources available to Texas veterans!

**JULY 21
Austin**

*Norris Conference Center
(Northcross)
2525 West Anderson Lane
Austin, Texas 78757
10 am to 1 pm*

**AUGUST 18
San Antonio**

*Live Oak Center
8101 Pat Booker Rd
San Antonio, TX 78233
10 am to 1 pm*

**SEPTEMBER
(Date TBA)**

El Paso
*El Paso Community
College
Admin Center*

Plan to Attend a Benefits Fair Near You!

Innovative Tyler Home Welcomes First Residents

The Watkins-Logan-Garrison Texas State Veterans Home in Tyler welcomed its first residents in early February 2012, with many officials and the media on hand for the celebration.

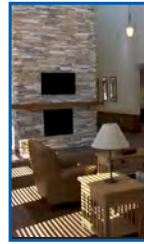
The Tyler home is different from traditional nursing homes, with 10 cottages, each containing 10 private rooms. This new design helps to create a more home-like feel.

The home joins seven others across the state in Amarillo, Big Spring, Bonham, El Paso, Floresville, McAllen and Temple, but unlike previous Texas State Veterans Homes, this one will focus on drawing residents into social connection by mixing the best communal aspects of a home while still maintaining privacy and independence for residents.

An open kitchen, dining room and large table are at the heart of each of the 10 cottages. Family-style meals will be served at the table and residents can enjoy each other's company afterward in a large living room with a fireplace. This hearth, or communal heart of the home, is what sets this home apart from any other long-term care facility in Texas.

"The kitchen is the heart of any home, and the new Texas State Veterans Home in Smith County takes that into account," said

VLB Chairman Jerry Patterson. "Instead of one large, hospital-like facility, this home consists of a cluster of small cottages built to draw residents into social connections around the dinner table."



Ten private rooms, each with its own bathroom, flank the hearth. Each cottage is set up as a "non-lift" facility, where overhead tracks with slings in each resident's room will provide safe transport of non-ambulatory residents from bed to bath.

Watkins-Logan-Garrison Texas State Veterans Home is built on 20 acres donated by the University of Texas Health Science Center at Tyler and is located just north of the Health Science Center, along the west side of Highway 155, just south of County Road 334.

For additional information on Texas State Veterans Homes, please call 800.252.VETS (8387) or visit texasveterans.com. Or, find us on Facebook at facebook.com/TXVLB. ☆

Dedication Ceremony for Flag Retirement Facility

After a year of planning and constructing, Eagle Scout candidate Matthew Allmand welcomed family, friends and fellow Scouts to the dedication of a flag retirement facility built under his supervision and leadership at the Texas State Veterans Cemetery at Abilene. The Boy Scouts and other organizations will use this facility to respectfully retire flags that are no longer suitable for display.

As per tradition, Boy Scouts ceremonially place ripped and faded flags in the burn pit as various passages are read aloud regarding the birth and significance of the U.S. flag. As flags

are burned, those in attendance are typically asked to silently reflect on the meaning of the flag and those who have fought to defend it.

In addition to demonstrating leadership in many other capacities, a Scout must plan, develop and give leadership to a service project for any religious organization or any school or community in order to qualify for Eagle Scout, the highest rank in Boy Scouting.

Allmand completed the requirements for Eagle Scout rank by helping to design the structure, presenting his proposal for approval to the Veterans Land Board, raising the funds for construction materials, and coordinating its construction. ☆



Matthew Allmand (center, front row) and members of Boy Scout Troop 206 following the dedication of the flag retirement facility.



Participants silently reflect on the meaning of the American flag.

VLB Goes Purple for Military Kids!

The VLB website and much of the VLB staff sported purple the weekend of April 13th as a show of support for the children of members of the armed forces.

April marked the national "Month of the Military Child," a time to honor youth impacted by deployment. Texas Operation: Military Kids (OMK), which is part of the 4-H Youth Development program of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, held its second annual "Purple Up! For Military Kids" and the VLB was proud to take part in the initiative. Other General Land Office employees also observed the event. ☆



VLB staff members.

Happenings in the Homes

Resident Celebrates 100th Birthday

Sergeant Jesus Martinez (Ret.) celebrated his 100th birthday in style Saturday, March 10, with a party held in his honor complete with a Mariachi band. Martinez, a resident of the Alfredo Gonzalez TSVH in McAllen, said he especially enjoyed the band's rendition of his favorite song, "Marcha de Zacatecas."



Mr. Martinez.

Mr. Martinez, born March 10, 1912 in La Feria, Texas, served 10 years in the military, starting with the U.S. Army Air Force during WWII. After the war, he signed up with the U.S. Army to help with Germany's reconstruction.

Through most of his life, Mr. Martinez has been an avid musician and played the guitar and xylophone. His daughter, Nelda Sanchez, said he once hand-built a 64-key xylophone just to see if he could do it, and it still works with perfect pitch. ☆

Two Homes Celebrate Easter with the Community

Two of our Veterans Homes, Lamun-Lusk-Sanchez in Big Spring and Watkins-Logan-Garrison in Tyler, held Easter egg hunts for the residents, family, and community members.



About 3,000 kids and kids-at-heart lined up for the annual Easter egg hunt in Big Spring.

While the Easter egg hunt was a first for the new home in Tyler, it was the 6th annual celebration for the home in Big Spring, and drew more than 3,000 participants to hunt for the 20,000 brightly colored eggs hidden across the grounds. ☆



Joe Raspante, resident, gets help from visitor Hunter McHenry during Tyler's first Easter egg hunt.

Watkins-Logan-Garrison TSVH Residents Go Fishing

Residents and staff at the home in Tyler brought along fishing gear for a day at Tyler State Park on April 5. The trip included a picnic lunch and five hours of fishing and relaxing.

Families of the residents supported the fishing extravaganza by bringing the residents' personal fishing equipment. Joe Raspante,



Joe Raspante displays the first, and biggest, catch of the day—a large mouth bass.



Joe Smith, resident, dips his pole in the water while Tom Niffenegger, maintenance director, sets up a second pole.

resident, caught the biggest fish of the day, a largemouth bass.

Everyone had such a great time that the staff has already planned another fishing trip to the Texas State Fish Hatchery in Athens, a catch and release facility. ☆



Richard Engledow, activity staff member Jessica Balcar, TSVH dog Major, Prentice Jordan, Freddie Hinton and Garvis Cochrum admire a restored antique truck.

County Car Club, which visits every year. Refreshments were served and "DJ Ruben" played hits from the '50s and '60s. ☆

Veterans Expo and Car Show set for the Alfredo Gonzalez TSVH

The 2nd annual Veterans Expo and Car Show will be held at the Alfredo Gonzalez TSVH in McAllen from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. on July 7. There will be free refreshments, live radio remote, a moon jump for kids, a health fair and door prizes. A \$10 entry fee will be charged for each car in the show and a \$50 fee will be charged for a vendor information booth. All proceeds benefit the Wounded Warrior Project. Call 956-682-4224 for more information. ☆

Car Show at the Frank M. Tejeda TSVH

Car shows are always popular with our residents, and those at the Floresville home are no exception. Residents and staff admired a wide variety of classic vehicles on March 20, courtesy of the Wilson

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Be sure to visit our Facebook page and our website for VLB loan rates, current news and photos, and event information. Let us know what you think!



Voices of Veterans "Every Veteran Has a Story to Tell" Exhibit on Display at the Capitol Visitors Center

The VLB Voices of Veterans program was created to capture oral histories of Texas veterans from all eras of combat, from World War II to Afghanistan. Free to any Texas veteran, the Voices of Veterans program provides a lasting legacy for historians, friends and family members, and helps us honor and remember the sacrifices of all Texas veterans.

The mission of the program is to remind future Texans that ordinary men and women, when faced with overwhelming adversity, can accomplish extraordinary things.



Visitors are met by this sight upon entering the exhibit.

Since Veterans Day, November 11th, 2011 (11.11.11), the Voices of Veterans oral history program has been highlighted in a

new multimedia exhibit at the Capitol Visitors Center in the historic Old Land Office on the Capitol grounds.

Entitled "Every Veteran Has a Story to Tell," the exhibit features a short video on the program, multimedia iPad kiosks with actual selections from the veterans' interviews from the program, as well as personal memorabilia. The exhibit runs through September 2012.

The "Every Veteran has a Story to Tell" exhibit was made possible by the State Preservation Board and the Texas Capitol Visitors Center. ☆



One of the iPad kiosk video displays can be seen behind the life-size cutout of Floyd Jackson, a Voices of Veterans interviewee.

EVERY VETERAN HAS A STORY TO TELL.

OPEN NOW THROUGH SEPTEMBER 2012



FREE EXHIBIT

CAPITOL VISITORS CENTER

112 East 11th Street

Austin, Texas 78701

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Now Available!



2012 MILITARY CALENDAR

This exciting wall calendar captures the spirit of America's military forces while remembering those who served. Each month features an inspiring wartime photo, with a special focus on individual veterans featured in the exhibit. Every day reveals a significant, often surprising, event in military history. Purchase online at voicesofveterans.org or in the gift shop at the Capitol Visitors Center.

\$5 each